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ABSTRACT

These proceedings of a symposium on literacy include precis of six speakers' comments and a directory of the participants. "The Hidden Education Problem" (Paul Simon) addresses the need to provide all citizens with the opportunity to learn to read and write. "The Role of Government in Literacy" (Jean-Jacques Noreau) describes the restructuring of Canada's federal government that created a National Literacy Secretariat with a new Department of Human Resources and Labor. "Investing in People" (Gary Hill) focuses on the use of a toll-free number, the Hotline, which is available in the United States and Canada, to allow citizens easy access to literacy services. "Baltimore: The City that Reads" (Kurt Schmoke) describes the city's literacy initiative, discusses the need for lifelong learning goals, and proposes a number of ways to meet those goals. "How Big Is the Problem?" (Peter Larson) focuses on the lack of action on the part of the Canadian business community to tackle the problem of literacy. Three triggers that can push literacy ahead on the business agenda are identified: total quality management, technological change, and labor-management cooperation. "Workplace Literacy" (Sheila Sherow) discusses workplace literacy as a national concern and describes a workplace literacy specialist model that was piloted in Pennsylvania. The directory of participants lists names and addresses of 301 contacts. (YLB)

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The Literacy Challenge
Le défi de l'alphabétisation

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The Literacy Challenge
Le défi de l'alphabétisation

Sam Kittner

Ms. Joan Baggett, White House; Mayor Kurt Schmoke; and Ambassador John de Chastelain

September 1993

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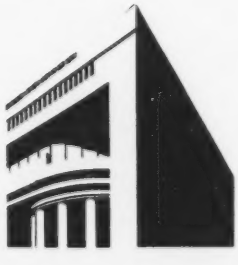

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LE DÉFI DE L'ALPHABÉTISATION

Le vendredi 10 septembre 1993, l'ambassade du Canada à Washington, D.C., en consultation avec le Secrétariat national à l'alphabétisation de Ressources humaines et Travail Canada, a été l'hôte d'un symposium sur l'alphabétisation d'une durée d'une journée.

Ce symposium a réuni des experts canadiens et américains provenant du monde des affaires, d'organisations syndicales, du milieu universitaire, du secteur privé et d'organismes gouvernementaux; ces experts se préoccupent tous des conséquences qu'un faible niveau d'alphabétisation peut avoir sur l'économie et la compétitivité des deux pays. Le principal objectif du symposium était d'encourager les participants à échanger de l'information et à créer des liens entre le Canada et les États-Unis.

L'ambassadeur canadien John de Chastelain a accueilli les participants au symposium, dont le nombre a dépassé cent cinquante. Le sénateur américain Paul Simon (D-Ill.), qui a prononcé l'allocution d'ouverture, a rappelé à l'auditoire que des millions de personnes n'ont pas les compétences nécessaires en matière de traitement de l'information pour leur permettre de réussir sur le plan individuel et professionnel. M. Jean-Jacques Noreau, sous-ministre des Ressources humaines et du Travail du Canada, a souligné l'engagement du gouvernement canadien à adopter des mesures pour faire face aux conséquences de l'analphabétisme au point de vue personnel, social et économique. Mme Madeleine Kunin, sous-secrétaire de l'Éducation des États-Unis et ex-gouverneur du Vermont, a partagé son expertise et ses idées sur le rôle que le gouvernement peut jouer pour aider à établir une relation de coopération entre les exploitants de programmes d'alphabétisation du secteur privé et ceux du secteur public. Le maire de Baltimore, M. Kurt Schmoke, l'un des principaux conférenciers du symposium, a exposé les grandes lignes d'un programme d'alphabétisation innovateur, appelé "Baltimore, la ville qui lit", que son administration a mis en oeuvre.

Des ateliers ont été organisés sous les thèmes "Rapprocher les gens", "Compétences de base en milieu de travail" et "Réussites." Les participants à ces ateliers ont discuté des défis à surmonter, par exemple le besoin d'élaborer des objectifs stratégiques et de trouver des sources de financement ainsi que les moyens à prendre pour atteindre les groupes cibles.

Ce compte rendu du symposium comprend un résumé des allocutions prononcé par les conférenciers et une liste des participants. Nous espérons que le dialogue suscité par ce symposium aboutira à une mise en commun des efforts pour faire face à la question cruciale de l'alphabétisation.

THE LITERACY CHALLENGE

On September 10, 1993, the Canadian Embassy in Washington, in cooperation with Canada's National Literacy Secretariat of Human Resources and Labour Canada, sponsored a one-day symposium on literacy.

The symposium brought together Canadian and American experts from business, labour, academia, private and governmental agencies and the voluntary and educational sectors who share a concern that national economic competitiveness is being jeopardised by weak literacy skills. The main objective of this symposium was to encourage participants to exchange information and develop partnerships on both sides of the border.

The symposium was attended by over one hundred and fifty persons, who were welcomed by Canadian Ambassador John de Chastelain. The opening address was delivered by U.S. Senator Paul Simon (D-IL.) who reminded the audience that, without a strong command of "information-processing skills," personal success in the workplace and in the community will continue to elude millions. Jean-Jacques Noreau, Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Labour Canada, underscored the Canadian government's commitment to addressing the personal, social and economic costs of literacy. Madeleine Kunin, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education and former governor of Vermont, shared her expertise and insight on the role that the government can play in forging a co-operative relationship between private and public literacy programmes. In a keynote address, Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke outlined his administration's innovative program to make Baltimore "The City that Reads."

Panel discussions on "Connecting People," "Basic Skills in the Workplace," and "Successes" dealt with such challenges as defining policy goals, identifying funding sources and reaching target groups.

These proceedings include précis of speakers' comments and a directory of the participants. It is our hope that the dialogue facilitated by this meeting will result in a combined effort on a most critical issue for Canada and the United States.

The Canadian Embassy, September 10, 1993

THE HIDDEN EDUCATION PROBLEM

Senator Paul Simon of Illinois

Let me tell you about three courageous people.

The first is Gloria Wattles from Louisville, Illinois, population 1,166.

She attended a town meeting I held at Teutopolis, Illinois. She stood up and said, "I'm 45 years old and I want to read the first letter I've ever written." She told her story, about her inability to read and write until she reached her mid-40s, about her years of misery, of hiding her inability from others. She told her story so effectively I asked her to come to Washington and tell it to a Senate subcommittee holding hearings on a literacy bill I am sponsoring. She did — and my colleagues in the Senate were as impressed as I had been.

The second person is Dexter Manley, the all-pro Washington Redskins defensive end. On the sidelines when Washington quarterback Joe Theismann broke his leg, Manley asked himself, "What happens to me if I break my leg?" At that point he was making $600,000 a year. He went to the Washington Lab School and said he needed help. They tested him and found he read at the second-grade level — after grade school, high school and four years at Oklahoma State University.

. He now reads at the ninth-grade level and is also studying Japanese. He told the Senate subcommittee his moving story.

Mary Blandin of Chicago is the mother of 12 and the grandmother of 22. She read at a second-grade level and her low self-esteem led her to alcohol. At a detoxification center, they told her where she could get help to learn how to read and write. She testified before our subcommittee. She read her testimony — and today has a job and is proud of herself.

All three had learning disabilities that had gone undetected.

All three hid their problem until they finally had the courage, with a little help, to face their deficiency.

How many people are there like that?

The best estimate is about 23 million Americans. They hide their limitations from their neighbors, and often try to hide them from their own families.

I held the first hearings in the history of Congress on this problem eight years ago. I've been able to get some things done: help libraries work on the problem, the establishment of a volunteer Literacy Corps under the VISTA program, some College Work Study funds to get students to help, and a small part of the funding for the homeless to help homeless people who face this problem.

But much more needs to be done.

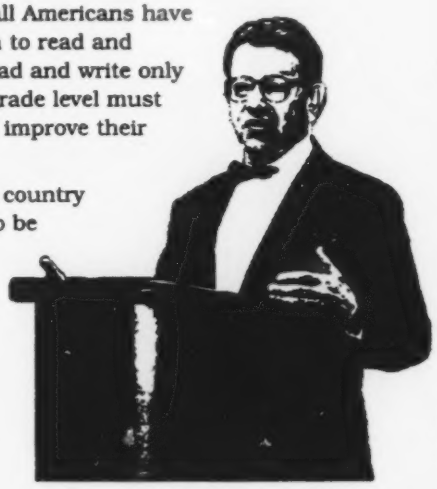
We need to see that all Americans have the opportunity to learn to read and write, and those who read and write only at the second or third-grade level must have the opportunity to improve their skills.

It is essential for our country that we do it if we are to be competitive with other nations.

It is essential for these people that we do it if they are to have a sense of pride and self-worth, to be able to help their

Paul Simon (D-IL) has served Illinois in the U.S. Senate since 1984. A former newspaper editor and publisher, he is the author of 12 books and a weekly column.

Senator Simon chaired the first Congressional hearing on literacy in 1981 and was the Senate sponsor of the National Literacy Act, which passed in 1991.



Sam Kittner

families as they should, as they want to. (A majority of people who go to prison cannot read and write.)

Why is this so important to the nation?

We read a great deal these days about the trade deficit. We cannot indefinitely buy more from other countries than we sell to them. Some day we will have to pay for this.

There are only two ways to pay for it: Greater productivity by our people, or reduced consumption, which means a reduced standard of living.

The better answer by far is to increase the productivity of our people. Teaching them basic skills is an obvious and major way to do that.

The Canadian Embassy, September 10, 1993

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN LITERACY

By Jean-Jacques Noreau

Despite the widespread availability of quality education in Canada and the United States, too many of our citizens are not equipped with the most basic of skills. Earlier this year a major restructuring of Canada's federal government was announced. One result of this reorganization was the creation of a new department of Human Resources and Labour that now includes the National Literacy Secretariat as well as a broad range of learning and training responsibilities. By restructuring the Government of Canada and in particular creating the department of Human Resources and Labour Canada, we believe that we can facilitate the development of a framework for human resource policies on which a skilled, active, prosperous and fulfilling society can be based.

We have a major challenge to ensure that our programs recognize that people have different needs at different stages of their lives. For example, people with weak literacy skills may be employed or unemployed, may need income support or be relatively self-sufficient, may be immigrants or native-born, male or female, have disabilities or be non-disabled. What our department must aim to do is to provide programs and services in a more cohesive way, a way that recognizes a small investment now can often pay huge dividends in the future. With scarce resources and increasingly complex demands, our programs and services must make sure that people are helped in making lasting improvements in their lives. We must reorient our programs in a way that actively supports real learning opportunities at all stages of people's lives. In the past, we tended to think of learning as something we do until we are equipped to enter the job market. We all know that jobs and learning are changing rapidly as we come to terms with new technology, economic globalization and other pressures. The only constant is for all of us to develop and sustain strong learning skills that will ensure we can adapt to a complex and changing world.

Sam Kittner

The federal government's literacy strategy makes an important contribution in helping fulfil the mandate of Human Resources and Labour Canada. Now, more than ever, citizens need the foundation skills of reading, writing and numeracy because these are the building blocks of learning. Literacy enables people to take advantage of other learning opportunities. Literacy allows people to develop the skills they need to live fulfilling, productive and self-sufficient lives as parents, employees, consumers and citizens.

Real and sustainable progress can be made only through partnerships. In the area of literacy, individuals and families are key players, and so are other partners — educators, social workers, community leaders, employers, unions, voluntary organizations, and business. Complex issues like literacy can only be addressed through a range of efforts that recognize the many important players and the many different approaches that have much to offer.

The federal government, through its responsibilities for programs such as training and the promotion of innovation and develop-

Jean-Jacques Noreau is Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Labour Canada, which is home of the National Literacy Secretariat. Mr. Noreau has previously served as Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare Canada, and of the Department of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Noreau has also held a number of other senior management positions in both the Quebec and federal governments. While working at the Quebec Department of Education, he was involved in developing the province's network of post-secondary institutions.

ment at the national level, will continue to make important contributions. To a great extent, the federal role in literacy in Canada is primarily one of catalyst and facilitator, and perhaps innovator.

The results of a 1987 survey on literacy skills conducted by Southam News renewed recent and collective attention to literacy and at the same time galvanized calls for a national strategy. The Southam study found that approximately one-quarter of the Canadian population had at least some difficulty in performing ordinary reading and writing tasks. These findings, along with the 1988 report of the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy which estimated that illiteracy costs the Canadian economy over fourteen billion dollars each year, brought the issue of literacy dramatically to the attention of Canadians.

A logical development of this work was to facilitate a more inclusive and cooperative Canadian approach. Consequently, the National Literacy Strategy was announced on September 8, 1988. This national commitment to literacy is quite simply to ensure that Canadians have access to the literacy skills necessary for participation in an advanced economy. The starting point for this commitment is that the basic ability to read and write is the first and most important step towards exercising citizenship in all respects.

A key objective of our approach is to ensure that literacy skills are brought to the people who need them, rather than expecting people to untangle the maze of programs and pull down the barriers that prevent learning. Because literacy is the foundation skill on which all other skills rely, an equally important focus is the need to attract people to learning opportunities that relate to their everyday life, whether this be jobs or a better sense of belonging to a shared community identity.

Formal education in Canada is a matter of provincial responsibility; therefore the actual teaching of reading and writing skills to adults is undertaken at the provincial/territorial and local levels through a series of partnerships between provinces and their education systems, and voluntary groups, literacy organizations, employers and labour groups. The role of the National Literacy Secretariat is to act as catalyst and facilitator, by funding innovative projects that attempt to remove barriers and to develop new approaches and new ways of doing things to provide better access to literacy training for adults. The Secretariat does this by supporting efforts in five areas:

Developing new materials that meet learners' needs

Improving coordination and information sharing

Increasing public awareness about literacy

Expanding the range of Canadians who take literacy training; and

Supporting research on literacy issues.

What have we learned from this? First we learned partnerships can work. The result of the federal government strategy of partnership and cooperation has been some very innovative arrangements between sectors that have often been at opposite ends of an issue, whether this be between levels of government, business and labour or with the voluntary sector. In the workplace, for example, as part of the literacy strategy, labour and management have come together to integrate literacy training into such workplace programs as occupational health and safety and industrial adjustment. Work, of course, is only one facet of our lives. In other areas, with the support of organizations like the Salvation Army, the John Howard Society, The Elizabeth Fry Society, and the Canadian Bar Association, we have been working to include

literacy as a component in comprehensive community crime prevention strategies. In terms of Canadian business, we have a strong partnership with ABC Canada, a private-sector organization which raises awareness about the importance of literacy in the world of work. ABC Canada's brief history is impressive. It has delivered millions in corporate contributions, ranging from an award-winning national public awareness campaign on the importance of literacy for children and adults, now in its third year, to a partnership with Teledirect, the producers of Canada's Yellow Pages phone books.

Second, we have learned that institutional change to promote literacy is possible. Making literacy an integral part of the business of our institutions leads not only to raised awareness but more importantly to action aimed at tailoring programs and services to better meet the needs of all Canadians, regardless of their current skill levels. We know that weak reading and writing skills can be a barrier to health. So the Canadian Public Health Association is working with a number of its partners to raise awareness of these issues among health professionals and design practical solutions, such as making sure patient information is written using plain language. I strongly support this approach because, if Canadians are going to take advantage of the programs and services that have been designed for them, administrators must take responsibility for making sure that all of us, regardless of our reading abilities, have understandable, user-friendly information on these programs and services.

Third, we have learned that when dealing with literacy programming at the national level, flexibility is crucial. From the outset of our strategy it was felt that there was little to be gained by attempting to define a "unitary" system or approach. Instead, the approach has been to encourage and support diverse efforts and to experiment. We have learned that successful teaching models and training methods are tailored to the specific circumstances of people, aboriginal people, people with disabilities, older persons, youth, etc. Learning can only be a positive experience when it recognizes and responds to the variety of life experiences and situations that learners bring with them.

These are some of the lessons we have learned. Let me now offer some very brief views on what I see these challenges as being. As we move to evolve governance and build Human Resources and Labour Canada, we are facing the challenge of remaining true to the lessons learned of partnership, institutional change and flexibility as we integrate learning into everyday living. We have the opportunity with government renewal to do this. We must build on the past successes, yet tailor our responses to today's needs. We must do this in a way that recognizes prevention, that provides for active programming, that respects diversity and ensures equality. We face the challenge of making a difference.

Canada is making some progress in improving literacy. The federal government does not own the literacy issue; it plays a modest but important role of innovator, facilitator, and catalyst. The balance of our accomplishments are due to our partners who represent all other sectors of Canadian society and who recognize that their investments in a literate Canada will pay huge dividends.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

by Gary Hill

Gary Hill is President of Contact Center Inc., of Lincoln, Nebraska, a private, nonprofit information/referral clearinghouse in the areas of human services, criminal justice, illiteracy and runaway services.

Mr. Hill is a speaker, consultant and trainer and has raised funds for a variety of nonprofit organizations and human service causes.

Within the United States and Canada the concern over the number of citizens found functionally illiterate has prompted much public discussion and legislative planning. Educational systems, giant bureaucracies, national organizations and lobbying groups of parents, educators, vendors of literacy material and involved citizens have called for new commissions, changes in existing programs and vast increases in resources. Between now and the development of new programs, the current efforts can be encouraged and enhanced with little or no additional funding.

Currently, media has established many public service campaigns geared to educate the public about the size of the literacy problem and how to help others or get help for themselves. Government agencies have established programs designed to reach special audiences such as immigrants who need help learning English and citizens who need literacy assistance to upgrade their current employment. Private business has established similar public information campaigns.

What all of these efforts have in common is the use of a toll-free number to allow citizens easy access to services. The Hotline, available in the United States and Canada, provides callers with referrals to local programs where they can get help for themselves and their families. If they can read, it is the number they can call to find out where, in their local community, they can volunteer to help others or how to start a program within their own business, religious organization or civic group. It provides "one-stop shopping" for people wanting information on available material or resources. More than one million people have called the National Literacy Hotline since it began providing referral services in 1983. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, has bilingual operators available on all shifts and is equipped to take calls from the hearing impaired.

Using this resource will keep the current momentum alive and allow for new players to jump in the literacy game. The major need of the hotline is for existing private and public programs to be sure they are listed in the data base in order to insure appropriate referrals. National and international efforts should use the National Literacy Hotline in their media campaigns and help cover the minimal costs of the calls generated by their efforts.

No doubt, time will bring great advances in techniques and governments will pass and implement programs to help alleviate the literacy deficiencies in our two nations. Waiting for that day requires patience which bureaucrats and human service folks seem to have in abundance, but those who want to learn or who want to help others do not have that kind of patience and should not be expected to wait. They don't have to -- help is available today if they but call 1-800-228-8813.

BALTIMORE: THE CITY THAT READS

By Mayor Kurt Schmoke

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today to talk to you about a subject that is not only close to my heart, but also a vital component of my long-term education agenda for the 1990's and beyond. I want to express my deep appreciation to Ambassador John de Chastelain for inviting me to speak, and to the Canadian Embassy and the conveners of this symposium, for encouraging the international exchange of ideas and information on this vital subject.

I know that this audience is made up of professionals in education, business, and government, from the United States and Canada. What unites all of us in the public and private sectors, cuts across both geographic and cultural boundaries, is our deep commitment to improving literacy services and educational opportunities for our citizens. Baltimore's literacy initiative may, in fact, be a kind of local version of what has been established in Canada through the National Literacy Secretariat. I hope that one of the outcomes of this conference is an ongoing exchange between Baltimore city and literacy officials in Canada and other American cities.

Sam Kittner

Mayor Schmoke talks to reporters outside the Embassy after his speech at the Symposium

This week, as many of you know, the U.S. Department of Education released its Study of Adult Literacy in America based on the results of the national adult literacy survey. The research may be comparable to the "literacy skills in daily activities" study conducted in Canada a few years ago.

The U.S. Department of Education's report profiles a number of interesting trends: 21 to 23 percent, or 40 to 44 million adults in America have only the most limited levels of skills in math, reading, and problem-solving. Some of those Americans with lower reading skills are immigrants, some did not complete high school, some are older, and some have handicaps limiting their educational achievement. Older adults are particularly at risk. And, not surprisingly, adults in jail performed at disproportionately lower literacy levels.

The costs of this level of illiteracy in our nation are incalculable in terms of lost opportunities, diminished lives, and social disintegration. On the economic front, business estimate they may lose between $25 billion and $30 billion a year in lost productivity, errors, and accidents attributable to poor literacy.

To me, the report's findings underscore that while we may speak of national educational goals, and while we may strive toward universal literacy, we have a long distance to go in articulating and implementing policies that truly prepare our citizenry to participate actively at home, work and in the community in the 1990's and beyond.

So today, I want to briefly recount Baltimore's story of how we have promoted literacy throughout the city, and how that journey has affected the lives of our citizens. I do so not only because I'm proud of what

Kurt Schmoke was elected Mayor of Baltimore in 1987 and re-elected to a second term in 1991.

In his first inaugural address he announced his intention to make Baltimore, The City That Reads. He has since established a cabinet-level city agency and a private foundation to fund, coordinate and expand literacy programs throughout the city.

we've accomplished, but also because Baltimore's model is one that can be replicated in cities and towns across the country, and may give us some insights into what a national literacy policy would look like. I want to conclude by broadening the discussion to encompass the need for lifelong learning goals, and by proposing a number of ways that we might meet those goals.

When I graduated from high school ... in 1967, people found jobs because they were strong and willing to work. Skills could be learned on the job.

First, I need to set the stage for the dramatic economic changes that have hit Baltimore and so many American cities over the past 25 years. When I graduated from high school in Baltimore city and set off for college in 1967, the largest employer in the city was Bethlehem Steel, and people found jobs because they were strong and willing to work. Skills could be learned on the job.

Today the largest private employer in Baltimore is the Johns Hopkins University and all of its affiliates, and employment is much harder to find. The jobs of today require skill, training, and education. And in increasing numbers, those who are unskilled and uneducated are closed out of the workplace, and unable to support themselves or their families.

When I ran for mayor in 1987, the campaign focused primarily on issues of people and quality of life. We began to talk about education and the vital role it plays in the personal lives of our residents. And we began to discuss how education enriches the entire community, by preparing a well trained workforce; enabling people to keep and improve their jobs; and giving city residents a sense of hope in the future.

I wanted to challenge the educational system so that it better met the extraordinary needs of our inner city children. And I spoke, time and again, about wanting all of our city residents, young and old, to have the enormous personal as well as financial opportunities that come from a good education. In my inaugural address, I described my dream that Baltimore might become "The City That Reads."

Over the past six years, we've begun to turn that dream into a reality. We had to begin healing a population that had been failed by the system. And that rebuilding process had to be defined and given shape.

Our first step was to establish the Baltimore City Literacy Corporation, a cabinet-level quasi-public agency. To my knowledge, Baltimore is the only city in the United States to give cabinet-level status to adult literacy. We also formed a private non-profit partner for it, called Baltimore Reads, through a partnership with a major non-profit organization, the United Way of Central Maryland.

These two organizations work in partnership with each other, and in partnership with other government agencies, non-profits, and businesses expand and improve literacy services, create linkages between agencies, and leverage new resources.

The Baltimore Reads board of directors represents a broad cross section of community leadership, and ensures that the voices of Baltimore's citizens are heard in the city's ongoing campaign to help provide second chance learning opportunities to non-reading and low literacy adults.

I've just described the outline, or structure, of our literacy program in Baltimore. But as with any story, the outline needs to be filled out with people, relationships, and dreams. First, we needed to capture the imagination of the community — both the community of learners and the community of people who were willing to help those learners. That meant raising the public consciousness that one out of 4 adults in Baltimore didn't have a high school degree, and couldn't read at an adequate level to get a good job, or even to function adequately in their daily lives.

We also had to begin bringing literacy services to the people who needed them, because many had limited skills, and were not comfortable navigating their way around the city. Many were unemployed, and couldn't get any on-the-job training. So we decided to build Baltimore's capacity to deliver literacy services by working with existing community-based organizations already in the service business, and to encourage them to build literacy programs.

We also decided that where appropriate, Baltimore Reads would develop model programs, seed new services, and in time spin those efforts off, either to other community organizations, or as free standing non-profits.

I want to briefly describe some of the literacy partnerships we have formed over the past few years, because at least in Baltimore, those partnerships have been the key to our emerging success. Here's how we've been able to capture the interest and support of the political, corporate, and general leadership community.

First of all, Maryland has a welfare reform initiative, called Project Independence, that mandates education for welfare recipients who have children under three years of age. We were able to use some of that welfare reform money, in partnership with other funds, to create our first new literacy program. Our partner in that first effort was one of the most prominent citizens of Baltimore, Baltimore Orioles shortstop Cal Ripken, Jr. (While I hesitate to mention that name here today during our tight pennant race with the Blue Jays, I am hopeful that in this instance, we can put away our competitive natures and focus on the more universal goal of literacy.)

Cal Ripken, Jr. and his wife, Kelly, understood that what we set out to do in Baltimore, was to re-order the community's value system, placing our highest priority on education, and providing second chance learning opportunities to adults seeking to become new readers. The Ripkens provided a $250,000 challenge grant to Baltimore Reads. And with that money, combined with welfare reform funding, we created the Ripken Learning Center.

The unique funding mix of the Ripken Center enables us to blend students who come voluntarily with those who are mandated to receive literacy services. This has had a profound impact on the environment created at the center. We are able to look more holistically at learners, adding a counselling component, and addressing issues of self esteem and motivation. These kinds of issues have a direct impact on the learning process.

Baltimore Reads and the city's Adult Literacy Initiative have also captured the support of the corporate community, and resulted in a number of unique partnerships with the private sector. We have been fortunate to be the recipients of a designated endowment established with one of Baltimore's community foundations by a major company, the McCormick Corporation. That funding has allowed us to make other funding linkages to serve welfare recipients, either in Baltimore Reads programs, or other literacy providers serving that population.

Another exciting partnership established by Baltimore Reads has enabled us to launch a pilot book bank project. In this program, we are redistributing new and slightly used books to low income families. Most significantly, we are expanding this effort to place these book bank shelves, books, and information cards in the waiting rooms of 15 department of Social Services offices throughout the city.

In our initial effort in a Department of Social Services office, not only did we find books going home with families, but we were also told that the waiting room became a much quieter and calmer place once waiting clients had access to reading material. In addition, one less security guard was needed since clients were more comfortable waiting.

I must admit, this is one of my favorite stories about "downsizing" city government, which we have undertaken as a major path to creating smaller, more efficient city agencies.

One of our most successful fundraising and public information campaigns has been the "Reading, Runs and Ripken" campaign, which draws on this city's great love of our m.v.p. short stop, and our common commitment to literacy. That program is in its third year, and today, every time Cal Ripken, Jr. hits an rbi, about $500 is raised for literacy programs in Baltimore. Over 250 people have become donors this year, which is a dramatic jump from last year. And again, the board of "Reading, Runs, and Ripken" involves leaders in the business and civic community, widening the circle of individuals and resources committed to adult literacy in Baltimore.

I am also pleased that we have attracted the support of the city's literary community to be part of this effort. Nationally acclaimed authors Taylor Branch, Tom Clancy, Lucille Clifton, Anne Tyler, George Will, and Jonathan Yardley make up the "author's circle" in our citywide literacy campaign. They represent yet another segment of our community that is now helping us succeed in this enormous undertaking.

The story of Baltimore becoming "The City That Reads" is far from over. But there is a growing sense of accomplishment and pride at what we have been able to accomplish so far.

When I came into office, there were six literacy programs in Baltimore, serving approximately 2,500 people a year. Today, we have expanded that number of programs to 40, and we serve 8,000 adult learners every year. As impressive as these figures are, they don't do justice to the more subtle changes that have taken place over the past few years, in attitudes, in perceptions, and in people's daily lives.

By increasing the number of services available to low literacy adults, and teaching more people to read, we are also changing the quality of their lives. As people increase their skills and become readers, their self esteem grows, and their self worth is restored. And as adults learn to read, they are often able to deal more effectively with the frustrations of their lives, and begin to find new solutions to their problems. And, of course, when adults learn to read, they can read to their children, and encourage educational accomplishment and tenacity in our next generation.

I also believe the citizens of Baltimore have a different sense of the community and themselves today. They know that education matters, and that as a community we encourage people to be self-sufficient. We are beginning to turn the community's value system around, placing human capital and investment in education as our highest priority. Increasingly, adults understand that it is safe to seek additional skill training. Increasingly, people are having the courage to go back to learning, and realizing education is a lifelong process.

It is this emphasis on lifelong learning that I would like to turn to for a moment. Today, our current expectation in Baltimore and across the United States is for people to begin learning in kindergarten and finish their education at the end of high school. And in Baltimore, like so many American cities, just getting kids to graduate from high school is an increasingly difficult goal. Yet today, the challenges that we are facing in this technological age demand an entirely new approach to education and its ongoing role in our lives.

We are now in the middle of an extraordinary transformation of society, similar to the emergence of cities in the middle ages, or the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, that is fundamentally changing the world in which we live. As American author and commentator Peter Drucker puts it, "The real, controlling resource and the absolutely decisive fact of production is now neither capital nor land nor labor. It is knowledge."

Today, as technology increasingly trans-

forms our lives and our workplaces, education and literacy become the defining factors in our survival. It's just that cities like Baltimore are changing from a manufacturing base to one that is based on technology and the life sciences. It's that the roles of organizations, both public and private, are changing in fundamental ways. Innovation and increased productivity — not protecting the status quo — will be the benchmark of a successful organization or government agency. The skills that enable people to think and analyze — the skills that the U.S. Department of Education has just identified are so lacking in America's general population — hold keys to tomorrow.

I believe that given the extraordinary economic and social challenges facing our country today, that it is time for the United States to look toward creating a different form of educational system that stresses the value of lifelong learning, is bound neither to a rigid calendar nor a single location, and that allows for differences in learning styles — in other words, a "cradle to grave" education system.

On some level, that is what we have begun to do in Baltimore, "The City That Reads." Literacy and education have become the highest of community values, and the top government priority. Creative literacy and education partnerships have been developed. Every opportunity to promote learning and to encourage the creation of literacy partnerships is seized.

In order to build a federal system which supports lifelong learning, we must identify adequate and stable funding from the federal government that can be easily accessed and freed from the duplicative and complex administrative requirements that currently characterize literacy funding in the U.S. A block grant to a city or municipality for lifelong learning beyond the years of public education may be the model to follow. Such a system would mandate partnerships between government and educational providers, community groups, and businesses. Further, we must recognize the vital uses of technology to enhance creative learning, and use that technology to the greatest extent possible, at all educational and age levels.

In their book, toward a literate society, authors John Carroll and Jean Chall stress that in order to create a national program for improving skills and addressing educational deficiencies, we need to know more about where and whom we have failed educationally. Now that we have that data, it is imperative that we move forward to design a national lifelong learning policy which encourages innovative programs for adults and family learning. Those programs must include literacy and skill training, learning how to learn and how to analyze, opportunities for lifelong learning, and preparation for school-to-work transitions.

I believe... that it is time for ... a different form of educational system that stresses the value of lifelong learning, is bound neither to a rigid calendar nor a single location, and that allows for differences in learning styles — in other words, a "cradle to grave" education system.

As all of you are so well aware, the world around us is being transformed by the power of ideas, and the unprecedented application of knowledge to technology. It is both our moral responsibility and our public mandate to prepare our citizens to participate in this new and challenging age. It is my hope that by working together at the community, local, federal, and international level, all of our citizens will have the opportunity to travel that highway of knowledge, productivity, and self-fulfillment.

HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

by Peter Larson

Peter Larson is Executive Vice President of Public Policy Forum, a research centre in Ottawa, Ontario, that encourages public and private sector cooperation.

He was previously Director of the Human Resources Development Centre of the Conference Board of Canada. He has published research in many areas of literacy and human resource management, including compensation, technological change and industrial relations, and writes a weekly newspaper column

It has now been six years since The Southam Literacy Report revealed that over five million Canadians could not "read, write or handle numbers well enough to meet the literacy demands of today's society."

The conclusions of the Southam Report had tremendous implications for Canadian business. If the number of people with less than adequate literacy skills was that high, then many of them must be in the workforce — in factories and hospitals and offices across Canada.

A subsequent study, carried out by The Conference Board of Canada, verified that more than 70% of Canadian employers had a "significant" problem with functional literacy in some part of their organization. It showed that poor literacy skills among workers had slowed the introduction of new technology, impeded training, caused production and inputting errors, and lowered productivity. And that spelled trouble for companies trying to compete in a world market.

Surprisingly, however, only one-fourth of the respondents had developed a management plan to tackle the issue. Few companies had developed a policy, and even fewer had created specific programs to deal with literacy in the workforce. In fact, less than 15% of employers had provided any sort of basic skills training.

The interesting question is — why not? Given the fact that a large majority of employers say that literacy is a problem, what can explain the lack of action to tackle it?

At first, some argued that employers needed help. Accordingly, the Federal Government's National Literacy Secretariat funded a number of "pilot projects" aimed at developing model programs for providing training to workers with inadequate reading and writing skills. For the most part, these "pilot projects" were successful — they did improve the skills of the participating workers.

Where these projects did not succeed, however, was in getting the Canadian business community to tackle literacy skill shortages on the massive scale that the problem seemed to warrant. In general, as soon as the funding dried up, the projects disappeared as well.

So here we are celebrating International Literacy Day, six years after the Southam Report and still talking about a nagging problem that just doesn't seem to go away. After six years of reports, pilot projects and attempts by what may be termed the "literacy community" to raise our consciousness, Canadian business has still not taken up workforce literacy as a "cause célèbre." What needs to be done to get Canadian business to address the literacy skills of its workers?

One line of inquiry is to look at some of those businesses that have tackled literacy in a major way, and try to find out what prompted them to do so. This was the approach used by David Shepherdson, a senior research associate of The Conference Board of Canada.

Shepherdson carried out extensive interviews in Canadian businesses that had made a major commitment to literacy skill upgrading, and attempted to understand what had pushed them to make this commitment.

Shepherdson found that while literacy may be high on the agenda of the personnel department, it is often far down on the priority list for those making the business decisions. However, he was able to identify a number of "triggers" which can push literacy ahead on the business agenda.

Three of these triggers are:

1. **Total quality Management**. Several of the companies studied had some kind of total quality initiative in place. They had quickly discovered skills shortages in their workforce that would derail the initiative if left unattended.

2. **Technological change**. Several companies were undertaking major technological changes. They found that their ability to complete the transformation required an investment in basic skills training.

3. **Labour-Management cooperation**. Several companies agreed to undertake major literacy programs primarily because this was a key issue for the union, and one on which labour and management could develop a level of co-operation.

Shepherdson's study concludes that basic skills training is not seen as an urgent priority for most businesses. But it also provides some reassurance that when workforce literacy deficits do impact business goals, it's possible to get management's attention and the resources to deal with the problem.

WORKPLACE LITERACY

by Dr. Sheila Sherow

Sheila Sherow is Research Associate at the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy at Pennsylvania State University in University Park.

She has written numerous journal articles, books and other publications on adult, workplace and rural literacy and has organized workshops and other special projects on a wide range of literacy issues.

If we define literacy by sets of skills needed to function in specific situations, a literate workforce is made up of individuals who have attained basic skills levels necessary for successful job performance or job training. In other words, a productive and flexible workforce that can adapt to the introduction of new technology and new business management and organisational techniques.

The fifth national education goal established in September 1990 states that "by the year 2000 every American adult will be literate and will possess the skills necessary to compete in a global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

Workplace literacy is a national concern. The workplace is changing: technological advancements and increasing competition are forcing businesses to break with tradition. In an effort to improve quality and increase productivity, growing numbers of companies are adopting participative management techniques and sophisticated statistical process control systems. Employers, educators, and policy makers recognise the need for well trained, adaptable employees and have expressed the need for collaboration in improving the basic skills of the workforce. However, despite the consensus of need, there are issues to be solved in the design and the implementation of workplace literacy program. Decisions must be made regarding the purpose and funding of these programs; specifically, goals must be clearly stated and the expectations and responsibilities of government, business, and education sectors must be defined.

In Pennsylvania we have some exemplary workplace literacy programs in place and we have piloted a workplace literacy specialist model.

The Institute for the Study of Adult literacy at Penn State University developed a "Workplace Technical Assistance Program" (WorkTAP) with a Pennsylvania Department grant. WorkTAP is a workplace literacy model that provides ongoing assistance through specially trained regional workplace literacy consultants. Regional consultants were trained in workplace literacy assessment techniques, job-specific curriculum development, and program planning. Consultants were selected based on their knowledge of literacy services and workplace literacy needs in their region. This enabled consultants to individualise workplace literacy techniques to best serve the special needs of local communities.

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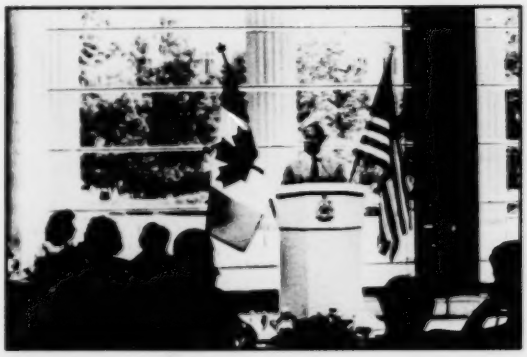

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